



COLLEGE REPORT

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The duties of the college president have been variously categorized, but the arrangement that appeals most to me identifies four areas of responsibility: he superintends, he facilitates, he develops and he leads in making policy.

Today, I will discuss the first of these functions, leaving the other three for weeks to come.

The statutes of every college and university name superintendence as the first duty of its chief administrative officer. Consider, for example, the statutes of Harvard, the nation's oldest institution of higher education. They read that it's the duty of the president of Harvard "to exercise general superintendence over all its concerns."

THIS AND similar statements in the ordinances of all colleges and universities mean that the president carries the ultimate responsibility for the work of the institution. He does only a small fraction of this work himself, but the trustees and the general public hold him responsible for everything done by everyone within the institution.

The chief executives of all enterprises have this same responsibility, but the college presi-

dent's task of superintendence can hardly be matched for complexity and difficulty because he administers an institution with two extraordinary characteristics. First, its chief product—education—defies measurement, and second, its major staff members—professors—constitute one of the most intractable breeds of human beings extant today.

BUSINESS and industrial organizations which manufacture and distribute goods always know how successful they are because their balance sheets tell them. Organizations and individuals performing services also know of their effectiveness because they don't retain their customers, patients, or clients unless they keep them satisfied. The dentist fills your cavity or removes the tooth; the doctor cures or allays your malady; the lawyer wins your suit or gives you workable advice. They all act in the here and now, and you can judge them in the here and now.

But professors prepare their students for the future, and students have little means of know-

ing how good his teaching is until the future arrives. Further, the particular part of the future which a particular professor will affect may be a long time off.

MANY PEOPLE and some professors disagree with this frequently stated point of view about superintending the quality of professors' work, but its pre-eminence among professors makes the superintendence function of college presidents more involved and vexatious than that of his counterparts in other social enterprises.

The situation today is much healthier than it used to be, but traces still vintinue of a campaign waged early in this century to abolish the office of president and even to scuttle boards of trustees. The campaign began about 1909 under the leadership of a disgruntled professor of psychology at Columbia University, the late James McKeen Cattell.

Cattell's father had been president of Lafayette College, and I suppose that the psychoanalysts would explain his antagonism toward college presidents by citing a deep-seated hatred for his father. In any case, Cattell abhorred college presidents and interpreted all their actions in the worst possible light.

THE STORY is told that one day when Cattell's young daughter asked him what to call her new rag doll, he proposed the name "President." "Why?" queried the child. "Because," responded Cattell, "rag dolls and college presidents have much in

common; either, for example, will naturally in any position." One cannot easily supervise the work of a person who believes supervision unnecessary, and who, to boot, hates your very existence as do professors like the distinguished scientist on the faculty of the University of Chicago who 50 years ago is reported to have walked by President Judson's home "each evening so that he could spit on that gentleman's sidewalk." One of Judson's successors observed that "academic communities, whatever their protestations to the contrary, really prefer anarchy to any form of government."

THE GREAT majority of present-day professors, however, have a much better understanding of the importance and necessity of the superintendence function of administrators than did predecessors of earlier decades. They will continue, nevertheless, to be individualists, and they will never submit to taking orders. This means that in performing his superintendence function the college president must depend upon the arts of persuasion and not upon the power to command.

The fact is that the college president can't command. If he tries to, he'll immediately be engulfed in large quantities of scolding rhetoric. He must reason, negotiate, persuade—and these are time-consuming activities and not easily quantifiable. To superintend effectively a college president must give more time to the function than the chief executive of almost any other kind of institution.

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